

## ◆ V - Interview Don'ts

1. Do not schedule or participate in an interview or an event if it will interfere with your mission. However, do not use the unit mission or being too busy" as a "smokescreen" to avoid the media or interview.
2. Do not attempt to cover negative events with a cloak of security. However, do talk about matters over which you have direct responsibility or personal knowledge and discuss only obvious facts and events. Refer requests for details about serious incidents, accidents, investigations or other such situations to your higher headquarters or PAO representative.
3. Everything is "on the record." Never answer "off the record" questions. Say, "I can't tell you off the record; however, I can tell you ... ." Watch out for the "turned off" recorder being "on."
4. Never lie. Always be careful of personal opinions, which may be viewed as representing the unit or U.S. Army.
5. Do not discuss exact numbers or troop strengths. Use terms like "approximate," "light," "heavy" or "moderate." You can give generalized details about obvious unit capabilities, but not specific details, procedures or ROE.
6. Do not discuss political or foreign policy matters. Don't be caught speaking for the President or State Department. Stay in your lane and talk about things within your specific area.
7. Do not provide the enemy with propaganda material by grumbling and thoughtlessly complaining. Remember the enemy watches CNN, too. Don't say or do anything you wouldn't want your friends or family to know, hear or see. Remember your key messages.
8. Watch out for characterizations of "terrorism." Higher headquarters and the State Department usually address suspected acts of terrorism. If your unit is involved in and is asked about an incident, stick to the facts and obvious events. You may be able to describe such incidents as criminal or belligerent.
9. Don't get trapped. If a reporter tells you he got information from corps or higher headquarters, refer him back to those sources for more details. Use common sense.

## ◆ VI - Helpful Hints

1. If you can't talk about something, tell the media why: Under investigation, OpSec, endanger lives, not my lane or I don't know. Then tell them what you want them to know, i.e., the mission was successful and we saved lives and helped a lot of people.
2. Be careful of statements of absolute nature, i.e., "We do not have a sexual harassment problem in my unit" or "All my soldiers have high morale." Only be absolute if you're absolutely positive. A better approach may be: "Morale is high overall, but everyone has high points and low points. The chaplain and first sergeant help monitor the situation ... ."
3. Generally, try to field the questions from the media and bridge to your message. It may sound silly to say the same thing three or four different ways, but it is how you get what is important out to the public. Update messages to the realities of your unit situation and current events.
4. Know what you can say and show to the media as well as the things you cannot discuss or show.



## JRTC REFERENCE GUIDE

### DEALING WITH THE MEDIA DURING MILITARY OPERATIONS

Provided by JRTC & Fort Polk PAO

#### ◆ I -- Plan to deal with the media

The media will be present during military operations.

Plan for all types of media contact: from scheduled, escorted, credentialed media to nonscheduled, unescorted, noncredentialed media. Determine a plan and proper COAs for each situation.

Plans include:

1. An agenda that includes interviews with leaders and soldiers and provides photo/video opportunities.
2. Assignment of internal unit media representatives (not the PAO).
3. Wargamed questions based on the current news and unit past situations. Responses tied to a command message theme based on the realities of the unit's operation. PA guidance and message themes are shared with all soldiers.
4. Treatment of the media: logistical, transportation and medical needs; protection if unit is attacked while media is present.

Let leaders and soldiers talk. Follow guidelines and published PA guidance. Trust the soldiers to tell the unit story and the American public to listen.

## ◆ II - Things to Know/Do

1. Remember, the media is a powerful communications device that you can use to tell the unit's story and support the overall information strategy. Treat it as such. All soldiers and leaders are potential ambassadors/spokespersons for your country and unit.
2. It's a leader's responsibility to present his/her unit to the media, and subsequently to the public, within the established guidelines. Soldiers do have the right not to talk; however, those who refuse to speak may send a powerful message that the unit is hiding something or the operation is going badly. This is especially true if leaders refuse to talk.
3. Media are influential members of the public. They are not the enemy and they're not trying to steal secrets. They are after a story. So, tell your story. Try to facilitate the event or even ask what can be done to help. This helps you guide the media to unclassified areas and events of your unit and gives you a better chance to select the best areas and soldiers to be seen and heard. Don't forget to help with photo/video needs too.
4. Secure classified or sensitive information and/or equipment at the source. Put it away or cover it up while the media is in the area. If it can be seen from the road or from across a field or if multitudes of civilians can see it, it's probably not a secret.
5. If you accidentally say or show something classified, remain calm and explain the situation to the reporter. Politely ask them not to use it. Report the incident to higher immediately. Let higher give you guidance. Never detain or confiscate any material or equipment from bona fide media. You will make matters worse.
6. Do not refuse to talk to unescorted media. During early stages of an operation, media are likely to be uncredentialed/unescorted. In this case, be courteous and as long as it does not interfere with the mission, talk with them.

## ◆ III - Prepare for the media

1. Never go into a situation blind. Ask PAO for help. Ask for help wargaming issues, questions and response themes with relevant command messages. Ask the PAO about what types of media to expect and what tie the unit operation has to larger issues in the national and international community. Train at home station.
2. Read and disseminate published guidance and how it applies to each level of command. Have a standardized SOP. Train soldiers on a variety of media situations and the proper COA to take. Notify security elements of possible media contacts. Rehearse plan. Rehearse messages prior to interviews.
3. Before interviews, think of the key messages your unit commander wants to convey. Try to generally answer the reporter's question and bridge into your message. Do this at every opportunity without sounding like a broken record.

## ◆ IV - Interview Do's

1. Be polite but firm. Before starting the interview, introduce yourself and tell the reporter how you would like to be addressed. Ask the reporters their names and try to break the ice. Use first names instead of 'Sir' or 'Ma'am.' This helps you to view each other as equals instead of appearing subordinate or patronizing. Tell them you have about 10 minutes to talk before you have to go. Try to be conversational.
2. Respond to hard questions with "bad" news as willingly as you do to the "good" news questions. This will establish credibility and rapport with the reporter and help the media see your side of the issue. It can also help with future reporting about your unit.
3. Take your time and think before answering questions. Formulate your answer, then speak. If the interview is taped rather than a live broadcast, and you stumble on your words, stop and collect your thoughts and then ask to respond to the question again.
4. Be brief/concise: A good rule of thumb is 15- to 30-second responses. Use simple language and avoid military terms, jargon and acronyms. Remember, your message is going to the American public or to the world. You want them to understand your message.
5. Ignore the camera and talk to the interviewer.
6. Answer only one question at a time. Let all reporters have a chance to ask a question.
7. Remain in control of the interview even if the questions seem aggressive or silly. Reasoned responses will help you stay in control of the interview. Maintain a professional attitude.
8. Always think OpSec and protect classified information (see Things to Do / Know # 5). Anything you say could get into enemy hands.
9. STAY IN YOUR LANE or area of responsibility. If you don't know, say so.